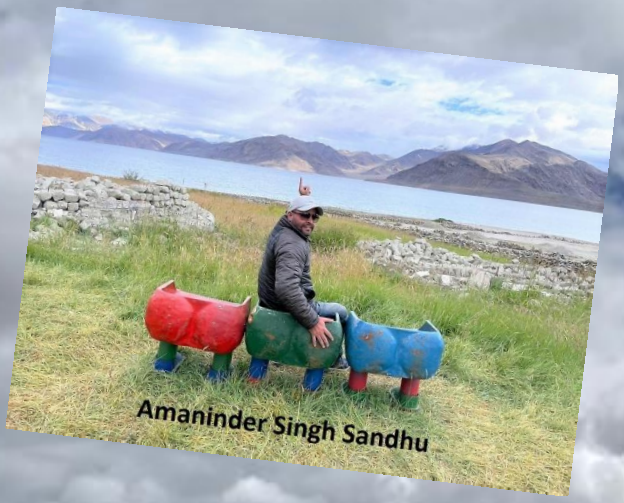
LEH-LADAKH ON MAHINDRA THAR

A WONDERFUL DRIVE AND UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

2021

BALJINDER SINGH

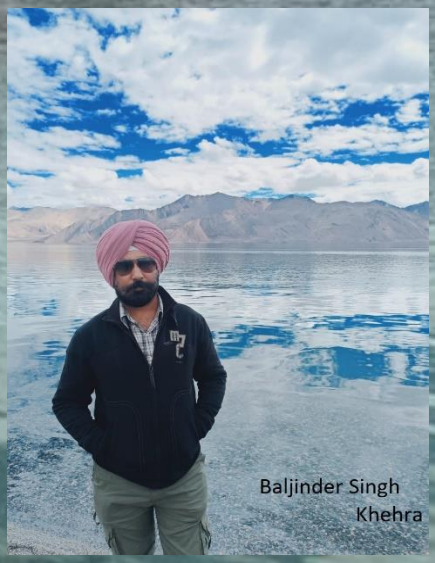
Those who show courage, fulfill their dreams.


Amaninder Singh Sandhu

Davinder Singh Sandhu

Dr. Opinder Singh Virk

Dr. Sandeep Singh Sandhu


Baljinder Singh Khehra

Introduction

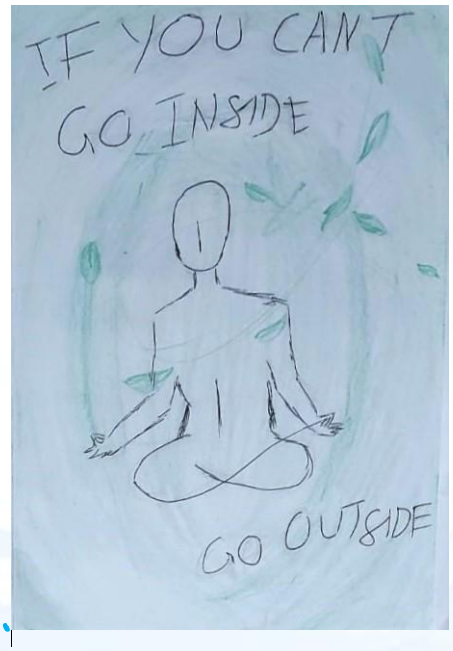
LADAKH (mean "*land of high mountain passes*") is one of the highest regions of the world. It consists of high plains and deep valleys. It is known for its pure atmosphere, blue skies, high passes, raw highlands, mighty peeks and naked mountains, beautiful monasteries, stunning stupas and indescribable fragrance in the air. Words seem less to describe its charm and beauty. It is a pure virgin beauty. Despite being part of this universe, it does not seem to be part of it.

A self-drive road trip to Ladakh is no small feat, it's a dream come true. Thanks to Amaninder Singh Sandhu to whom we are all known as Kaku and Dr. Sandeep Singh Sandhu for arranging a trip to explore the Ladhak region and their mighty passes. In-spite of potholes, slippery and unpaved roads and stretches of rubble and grift, Kaku's driving skills and Dr Sandhu's ease of driving made this journey not only safe but also comfortable. Special thanks to Dr Opinder Singh Virk and Davinder Sandhu without them, this trip would have been incomplete. Their smiling faces and adjustable nature guided us to enjoy in the worst situations.

Midway to Ladakh

Midway commonly known as Miḍavē dī chata (ਮਿਡਵੇ ਦੀ ਛੱਤ) is not just a restaurant, it has witnessed countless joys and sorrows. Every evening friends gather here and enjoy the evening here just like at the fair. One evening the name of Ladakh came into their conversation. Then suddenly, Dr Sandhu proposed going to Leh-Ladhak. Everyone agreed, the next day only Dr Virk, Dr Sandhu and Kaku got ready. Then they took me and Davider along. This is how our journey to Leh-Ladhak began.

It's time to turn the page. Life is like ice, enjoy it before it melts



Day 1 (August 17, 2021)

The bag is packed, everyone is ready. Two 4x4 Mahindra Thars are ready to move. We started our journey at 9.48 a.m. from the Land of Martyrs, Sri Muktsar Sahib. We reached the Lakanpur border via Amritsar after traveling 274 km in 3 hours 43 minutes. Again, we travelled for 60 km in 47 minutes and took the first break of 10 minutes at Vijaypur. We filled oil itn the vehicles at the Indian Oil Pump, Jammu Bypass and left for Patnitop. In the excitement of driving in a new Tunnel called Chenani-Nashri Tunnel (Patnitop Tunnel) of 9.28 km, we missed the Patnitop and took the second break at Karmeel in Doda and enjoyed the Rajma-Chawal. It’s almost 6.30 pm, Srinagar is too far from us, so we finally decide to stay at Banihal, which is almost 46 km away. Banihal is a small town in Ramban District. There are hardly any good hotels and we do not have any options because it's 8.30 pm. So we put in A-one hotel and started enjoying the drinks. In the meantime, Virk sa’ab arranged the non-veg snacks from the nearby market as our hotel serves only vegetarian food.

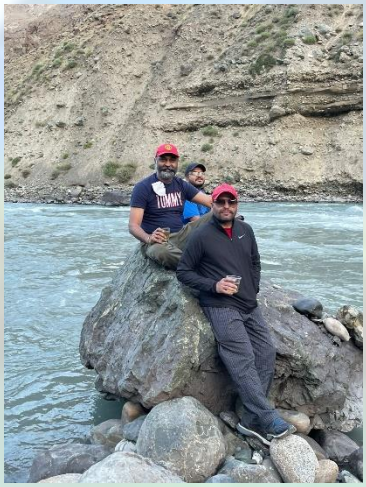
On the first day, we covered approximately 477 km in 10.15 hours and enjoyed good sleep as the tougher journey begins tomorrow.

Day 2 (August 18, 2021)

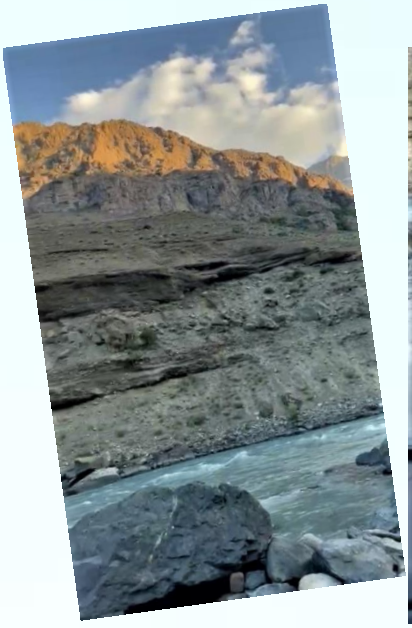
After having a light breakfast from the hotel, we started our journey at 9.10 am. By mistake, we missed the Qazigund tunnel road and reached Pahru Chowk through the Jawar tunnel. There is an interesting story about the Jawar tunnel. It was built by a German company with the condition that whatever they found during the digging would be there. Unfortunately, they did not find anything except one big python, and they even took it with them. After Qazigund (*Gateway of Kashmir*) there was plain land on both sides of the road. Basmati was visible everywhere and big and beautiful houses were noticeable on both sides of the road.

We bypassed Srinagar and reached Sonmarg around 3 o'clock, after having lunch, we decided to move ahead. Then we crossed the Zoji-la (the second highest pass on the national highway in India at the height of 11575 ft) also known as the "Mountain pass of blizzards". Despite the road were full of gravel, sharp turns, and precarious edges with terrible conditions of the road, we passed it within an hour and reached Dras.

Dras is the coldest place in India and in the world, it is the second coldest inhabited place after Oymyakon, Siberia. At Drass, after paying the tribute to Kargil war heroes, we moved forward. There were several campsites near the river but we moved toward Kargil for a better option. The Drass River was flowing along the road, which made the journey more enjoyable. We took the Jeeps down and sat on the rocks on the bank of the waterway and started enjoying the cool breeze and scenic view. After having two pegs with the cool water from the river, we moved toward Kargil. We filled the oil in vehicles from Drass. It's always advisable to fill the fuel from Srinagar as there is no gas station in between.



Today is the beginning of whatever you want.



We finally reached Kargil around 9.00 pm and checked in Hotel Siachen. This hotel was better and bigger than the previous one. Kargil is the second largest town in Ladakh after Leh. It is located in the center of the Suru River valley. Again, at the day end, we enjoyed a few drinks and along with the delicious food of Kargil.

On the second day, we voyage approximately 313 km in 10 hours and still feel energetic as we already crossed the Zojila pass.

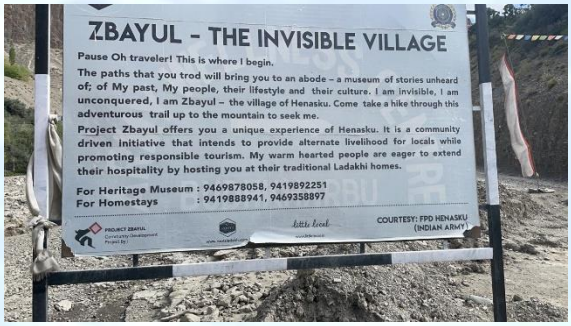
Die with memories, not with dreams.

Day 3 (August 19, 2021)

When we woke up in the morning, I found that Kaku and I forgot our jeans and belt at Banihal, now we can do nothing as we did not have any contact number of the hotel. After taking breakfast, we checked out from the hotel at 7.00 o'clock. Within two hours we crossed the Namika La and Fotu La and started feeling proud of ourselves. Fotu La is the highest pass on the national highway at the height of 13479 ft. Naked high and big mountains and deep blue sky all around were making the journey more pleasurable.

Around 12 o’clock we reached Nimmu. This is one of the prettiest places you are ever going to see. The greyish Indus River Kisses the bluish Zanskar River and engulfs it. Kaku’s hawk eyes worked and spot the isolated and finest bank of the river. We spent around 30 minutes there and enjoyed the confluence of rivers.

Nothing can compare to the beauty of life and nature.

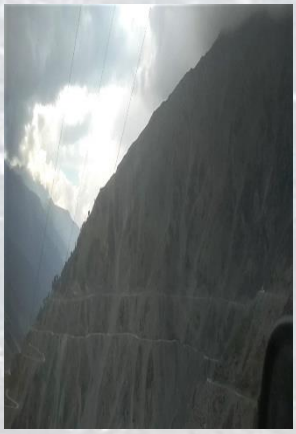


Then we moved toward Magnetic Hill. It's only an optical illusion of a hill, nothing more. Dr. Virk did go-karting but got bored because the car was running at very slow speed. So Kaku and Dr. Sandhu decided to do the real off-riding. Then we turned our vehicles toward the naked mountain on the opposite side of the magnetic hill. Indeed, after sharpening steep and without road, we reached the most noteworthy point within a couple of minutes. We returned gradually and carefully, as there was the same slope while descending. We all relished the drive and were exceptionally grateful to Dr Sandhu and Kaku. Subsequently, we bowed at Gurudwara Pathar Sahib and reached Leh at 3 o'clock.

Then we started looking for lodgings and found the Hotel City Palace, which was suitable for us as they give the exclusive access to the roof to enjoy the drinks. I rested for a while and by then both the doctors and Kaku went to the market to arrange the liquor. After getting up, Davinder and I did a round of the market and did a little bit of shopping for the kids. Meanwhile, everybody had come to the hotel.

On the third day, we travelled approximately 162 km in 8 hours, since this time we halted at numerous places and delighted the travelling. Like every evening, we enjoyed the top-notch snacks alongside Leh's alcohol.

You can't express Ladakh in words, go and see it.



Day 4 (August 20, 2021)

Before the start of the day, we filled oil and air in the vehicles moved around 10:20. Everyone was thrilled to reach Khardung La (The highest motor-able road at the height of 17982 ft). Within 70 minutes, we reached there. We had noodles and tea at the café. Its human nature that he is very happy to see his community in a distant country, and we were not exceptional, we all were very happy to see the Punjab Regiment at Khardung La. They also greeted and welcomed us, and we all brought a souvenir from their shop.

Then we moved toward the Nubra valley. After crossing Satti, the Nubra River starts flowing on the side of the road. There are two roads at Nubra, one is for Siachen Glacier and the other one is for Hunder. We decided to move toward Hunder to explore the silk route. There was sand on both sides of the road surrounded by towering mountains, it is a cold snow desert. Even two-humped camels are found there, tourists and kids enjoy their ride. While crossing the Diskit, we saw the huge Maitreya Buddha statue at the top of the mountain.

Without LADAKH, Yours memories will never be accomplished.

Within half an hour, we found a very cool camping site named Dowa Delux camp on the bank of the Shyok River. The camp was located in a marvelous garden having the trees of apple, apricot, and bamboo. Besides, the natural beauty it was clean and comfortable camps, the nature of the staff member was unmatchable. There were a lot of greeneries surrounded by naked mountains.

In the evening, we all enjoyed drinks in the garden and did the dance to the Punjabi tunes. It was really a wonderful evening. Their friendly nature and delicious food captivated everyone's heart.

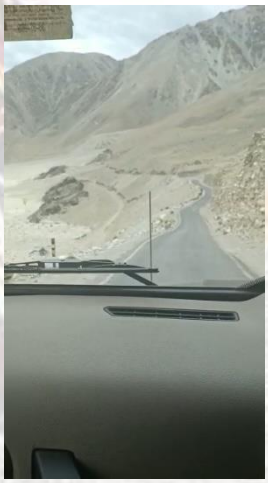
On 4th day we travelled 110 km in 5 hours.

Day 5 (August 21, 2021)

We all slept comfortably, I woke up early in the morning. I went to town and met two families. There I came to know that the people are very happy and prosperous. Despite being educated (Roughly 97 % of people in the Nubra valley are literate, most of them are either graduates or postgraduate), most of them were doing farming, and even those who go far to do jobs come back later and do farming. Due to the milder climate and availability of water, the land is cultivated. They grow orchards of Apple and Apricot. I also saw a lot of bamboo sticks, willow, and popular trees in the town. They also grow various crops like wheat, barley, peas, millet, etc. The thing I like the most is that there is complete gender equality. Before leaving the resort, I just had a few words with Eishey, he is a localized guy and the owner of the resort. He is a down-to-earth guy and shared not only valuable information but also guided us for the rest of the unplanned tour.

We had a yummy breakfast and checked out the resort at 10 o'clock. I got surprised to see the Kendriya Vidyalaya (branch of my school) at Diskit. There is one principal and four teachers for 16 students. After talking to Ashish Sir, I came to know that here the population is very fewer, and the school is being run with every facility for even a few students. It was a wonderful experience to interact with highly qualified teachers, and I was starting to feel proud of being a KVian.

We filled up with oil from Nubra filling station and started moving on the smashed stony roads between the waterway and highlands. After going some distance, we noticed that a Maruti Alto with four people was also going in front of us. Their car got stuck again within a short distance, their car got stuck in the stones. Till the people came for their help, three guys came out of the car and pushed the car and drove away. When this happened the second and third time, we laughed a lot to see their courage to drive the Maruti Alto on such roads. We also saw Yaks and horses along the roadside between Durbuk and Lukrang.

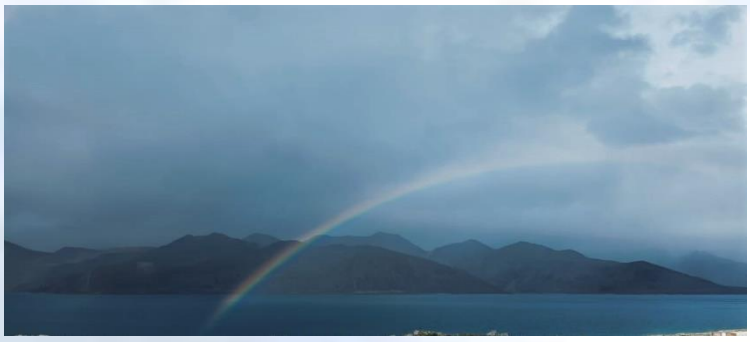


VISIT HERE BEFORE YOU RUN OUT OF TIME

Around 5 o'clock we reached the starting point from our side of Pangong Lake. Pangong Lake is the highest saltwater lake of deep blue colour along with the naked dark brown colour of mountains of 135 Km in length at the height of 13845 ft. 30 Km of the lake is in India while the rest of it is with China. The lake changes its colours according to the sunlight. Instead of staying at Spangmik where most of the people put on, we prefer to stay in Maan Village which is 8 km away from this point.

We saw a lovely rainbow on the lake while driving along the lake toward Maan Village. Maan is a small village with 35 families.

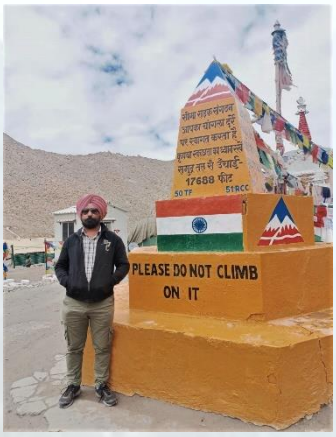
EVERYTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE IS REAL –PABLO PICASSO



After finalizing the camp along the lake far night stay, we took our Jeeps and reached the isolated place along the lake. We put up our own tent and took our chairs and started enjoying the Rum at the bank of the magnificent blue lake. Within an hour we returned to our camp and had dinner, but due to bad weather, we missed the chance to see the planets and the milkyway at the telescope located at Maan Village. Then I walked for half an hour along the lake. In the meantime, Dr. sa'ab had gone to their bed, Kaku was still enjoying the drinks. When I came back, Kaku also went to sleep.

Till now everything was going perfectly except the behaviour of Mrs. Padma, Owner of our camps, she was doing a lot of if's and buts in every matter, we don't know what her problem was. Still, it was our best day. On this day we travelled 175 km in 4 hours and slept well.

IN NATURE EVERYTHING IS PERFECT, IT CHANGE ACCORDING TO YOUR PSYCHE



Day 6 (August 22, 2021)

What can anyone envision, the beginning of the day better than this? There was a deep blue lake changing its colour each minute on the edge of mountains, and the sweet wind was blowing to amuse you with every movement of your life.

After having breakfast and a little defy with Padma ji, we started our return journey to Leh via Chang La, Sakti, and Kharu. When we crossed the Durbuk, the whole road was an uneven rocky road, so it took us a long time to reach Chang La. We again crossed another highest mountain pass named Chang La (at the height of 17688 ft). During the last four days, we crossed the five highest passes of India.

Finally, we reached Leh in 4 hours and did lunch at Punjabi Dhaba. I met Col Jaspreet Singh at Leh after a long time, it's really great to meet someone whom you like a lot.

It was only 4 o'clock and there was no reason to stay in Leh except Padma Ji as we were getting away from her……"Dil sulag sulag jaye .....". Yeh gana sahi hai na Dr Virk Sa'ab".

So we decided to move further till 6 o'clock. Now it was almost 6 and we start looking for the hotel but we didn't found anything worth-full. At long last, we reached the front of Moonland hotel at Lamayuru. I don't know, what was the connection with Hotel Moonland? Whenever I tried to search the hotels, Moonland came first. We didn't find any rooms there. Meantime Dr. Sandeep Singh Sandhu found the worthy rooms at Hotel Swastika with an extremely good picturesque landscapes view. So we chose to remain there.

Like each evening, this evening as well we drank a lot of alcohol with succulent snacks.

On the 6th day, we moved 266 km in 7 hours. Till now our everyday has been better than the previous one. With the same hope, I and Davinder Sandhu went to bed, but Dr. sa'ab and Kaku were still enjoying drinks.

Day 7 (August 23, 2021)

In the morning, when I came out of the hotel, I realized that the morning of Lamayuru was as wonderful as the evening. At that point, I perceived that why it is known as the land of Moonland. Coming out of the hotel room, I met the Captain (owner of the Hotel). I felt so glad to see him doing gardening in the backside of his hotel as he was growing every vegetable in his small lawn as my mother does in her garden. I am also the son of a farmer, whenever I see someone doing farming, even doing kitchen gardening, I really feel passionate about it.

Then we had breakfast and left the hotel at 10.45 a.m. Today no one was in a hurry. We planned to stay at Pahalgam for the next night. We crossed the Drass around 2.30 pm. After saying goodbye to the Gateway of Ladakh, I began to think that, despite taking numerous pictures, the beauty of the sight that my mind captured is far better than photographs by high-resolution cameras.

It was 3.00 o'clock and drizzling began, we were crossing Zojila pass, during the rain, it's become very dangerous to drive on this mountain road. It's said to be one of the most treacherous passes in the world. The road is nothing more than one lane crumbling dirt trail. We were blessed that we crossed it before the heavy rain.

The rain had stopped now and the beautiful valley of Sonmarg looked so beautiful we could not describe it in words. Deodar and Chinar trees were adorning it.

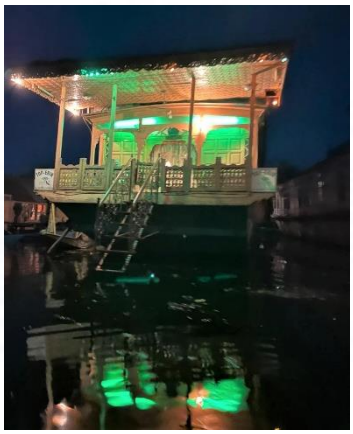
HERE, HEAVEN IS NOT ONLY OVER OUR HEADS BUT ALSO UNDER OUR FEET- "YEH TO KASHMIR HAI"

In a local dhaba on the outskirts, we had lunch of “Rajma Chawal" and “Maggi”. With tea, we had taken the local biscuits which were very delicious. At the Lunch Table, Dr. Sandhu and Kaku were discussing that which Thar is superior. After so many years of my life now I came to know that Thar with gear is called male Thar and Automatic Thar is a female Thar which runs with elegance. There we also decided that it was not possible for us to reach Pahalgam, so we all decided to spend the night in Srinagar.

We reached Srinagar at 7 o’clock after travelling 255 km in 8 hours. I and Dr Sandhu took the Shikara to look at the Boathouse for a night stay. We liked the first boathouse, despite being old, it was neat and clean. We bought tandoori kabab and tandoori fish made on a small tandoor on the boat. We enjoyed the same in Dal Lake with liquor on the lawn of the boathouse.

Everyone was relaxed, so we kept playing cards till 3 o’clock alongside drinks. In Punjab, there is an old saying that “Marriages are never accomplished without the quarrel of“Saas” and “Bahu". Similarly, how could our journey be over without the wrangling of Kaku & Dr Sandhu.

After that, everyone went to their room to sleep.



Day 8 (August 24, 2021)

Like yesterday, today also no one was in a hurry, everyone got up late, had breakfast, and left for the market while sitting on Shikara. Everyone bought something for their wife and kids. We left Srinagar at 12.30 with some sour-sweet memories. In return, we stopped at Banihal and picked our pants from the hotel. We got a lot of traffic after Banihal, and it took 6 hours to cover the distance of 165 km.

When we reached Patnitop, there was thick fog, and nothing was visible. With a lot of effort, finally, we found a good hotel.

Being the hotel was at a height, it had a very scenic view. Pine trees were looking very attractive. Besides, this hotel's lawn was huge and well maintained, so we were all on the lawn and ordered snacks. Just had a couple of drinks, it suddenly started raining, so we returned to our rooms. We ordered food in the rooms and started playing cards. After having dinner, everyone went to their beds for sleep.

Day 9 (August 25, 2021)

Like yesterday, everyone got up late, and there was no more enthusiasm. On our way back, we missed the Udhampur-Sambha road and went on the Jammu highway Road. There we filled the petrol and drove the car back. Due to this, we wasted almost half an hour. Then we ate food and drove the vehicle towards Muktsar Sahib. Today Kaku and Dr. Sandhu drove very fast and travelled 430 km in just 7 hours. After dropping Davinder at Faridkot, we reached Midway at 9.00.

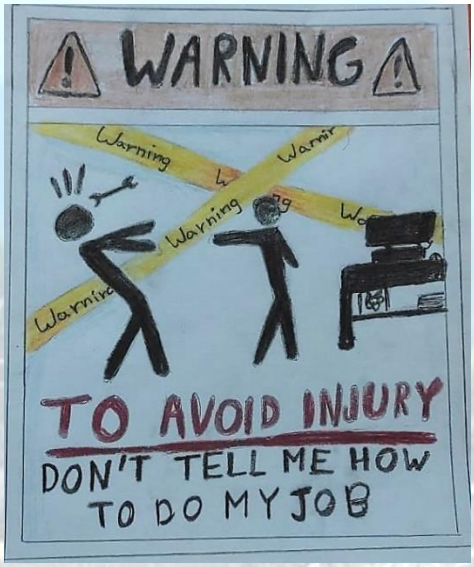
The thought of this trip began at Midway, so it had to end there only. Bedi sa'ab, Dr Shami Brar, Dr. Gurraj Singh, and Raj Chahal welcomed us with the garland of flowers as if we had come back after winning a war. After having the welcome drink, everyone left for their home.

Everyone thought that we would start a new expedition soon. The next morning I also returned to Chandigarh with the same thought.

See you. After a break……in the journey.

Drink Lot of Water

Even if you are coming by road, it's always advisable to have Diamox 250 mg for two days.



Never through wrappers and water bottle here and there.

Always take the local advice before starting the day.

Drive safely.

Never believe in three W

W- Wine ✓ Buy your quota whenever you find a wine shop. Here they close the shop every second day without any reason.

Shops are in Vijaynagar (Jammu), Srinagar Market, Leh Market.

W- Weather ✓ Always stay in camps even if you have your own tent.

W- Way ✓ Never solely believe in google, always take the local Advice.

Things to Carry

Comfortable folding chairs & Portable tent.

Stick, Knife, Medical Kit, Nuts, Chocolates & ready to eat food.

Glasses, Torch, Binoculars, Water bottles, Light Warm Clothes, Goggles, Sunscreen cream, Mustard oil for skin, Nail cutter, rope.

Battery charging cabel & Puncher kit.

Always carry spare memory in the phone or carry a good camera along with you.

Paper soap...

Beautiful places that we missed

Ladakh

Royal leh Palace

Tso Moriri lake

Astromony Session at Maan

Umling La

Indian Astronomical Observatory, Hanle

Siachen Glacier

Hemis National Park

Alchi ,Thiksey Monastery & many more monasteries.

Srinagar

Chasme Shahi, Shalimar & Nishant Garden

Pahlgayo

Gulmarg

Tulip Garden

Aharbal Waterfall

Shoping at- Lal Chock, Residency road, Zamikadal Road, Kashmir Govt Art Memorial

Jammu

Surinsar lake

Pathankot

Ranjit Sagar Dam lake

Specifics:-

Day1

Route: Sri Muktsar Sahib- Faridkot-Harike-Amritsar-Lakhanpur Border-Vijaypur-Nagrota-Udhampur-Ramban-Banihal

Distance Covered-477 Km

Night Stay at A-one Hotel Banihal (Pahalgam, Gulmarg is recommended , for that start early.)

Day2

Route: Banihal-Jawar tunnel-Srinagar Brpass- Sumbal-Hari pora-Kangan-Sonmar-Zojila-Drass- Kargil

Distance Covered-313 Km

Night Stay at Hotel Siachen Kargil (Camps around Drass or Mulbekh is recommended)

Day3

Route: Kargil-Namika La-Fotu La-Lamayuru-Alchi-Nimmu-Magnatic hill-Gurudwara Pathar sahib-Hotel City palace Hotel, Leh

Distance Covered-162 Km

Night Stay at Hotel Hotel City Palace, Leh (Resorts in Leh outskirt recommended)

Day4

Route: Leh- Khardung La-North Pullu-Khalsar-Nubra-Diskit-Hunder.

Distance Covered-110 Km

Night Stay at Dowa Delux camp, Hunder(Recommended)

Day5

Route: Hunder-Diskit-Khalsar-Shyok-Nebuk La-Satti-Tangyar -Durbuk-Tangtse-Lukrang- Spangmik-Maan

Distance Covered-175 Km

Night Stay at Maan camp, Maan(There are lot of better options at Maan Village)

Day6

Route: Maan-Spangmik-Lukrang-Durbuk—Chang La-Sakti-Karu-Leh-Alchi-Lamayuru

Distance Covered-266 Km

Night Stay at Hotel Swastika , Lamayuru(Recommended)

Day7

Route: Lamayuru-Kargil-Drass-Zoji La-Sonmarg-Gandarbal-Srinagar

Distance Covered-255 Km

Night Stay at Boathouse, Dal Lake Srinagar

Day8

Route: Srinagar,Qazigund-Banihal-Ramban-Patnitop

Distance Covered-165 Km

Night Stay at Hotel Patnitop Height , Lamayuru(Recommended)

Day9

Route: Patnitop-Udhampur-Thanua-Ramnagar-Samba-Kathua-Lakhanpur-Gurdaspur-Amritsar-Harike-Faridkot-Sri Muktsar Sahib

Distance Covered-430 Km

Night Stay at Hotel Patnitop Height , Lamayuru(Recommended)

Leh-Ladakh on Mahindra Thar

ROADS ARE MADE FOR JOURNEYS. SO ALWAYS BE A TRAVELLER, NEVER BE A TOURIST.

Leh-Ladakh on Mahindra Thar
Mahindra
PB 3DX 4767
PB35AH4490
It is not luck that determines your destiny. It is you who decides it.